In Other Words



Poems by Odia Women Poets

Translated by

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INTRODUCTION

– Snehaprava Das*

Women in Odisha have been engaged in writing poetry for quite a long time. In fact, women poets have made a significant contribution to the rise and growth of Odia poetry. During the pre-independence period, women poets like Bidyutprava Devi, Nirmala Devi, and Kuntala Kumari Sabat established their reputation as creative writers through their sensitive treatment of issues relating to women in the existing socio-economic environment and also to human condition. They had paved the way for more women poets seeking creative self-expression. While Bidyutprava Devi revealed a deep concern for the women of her times who were voiceless victims of male aggression, Kuntala Kumari Sabat's poems like *Awhana* were strongly patriotic in nature. A subtle strain of romantic mysticism could also be discerned in Kuntala Kaumari Sabat's poems like *Mun Ta Taku Kebe Dekhinahin (I have never seen him)*

> I have never seen Him
> But sensed His presence within
> My heart is drawn toward Him
> Though He sojourns at some far-off place
> Unknown and unseen.
> ("I Have Never Seen Him", Translated by Snehaprava Das)

Bidyutprava Devi, for her part, raises her voice against the servility imposed on woman in the following lines:

> Am I a bonded labourer?
> Work, work and more work
> From morning to night,
> How can there be in all this
> Time for poetry? ("Dilemma")

One may detect here a faint echo of Emily Dickinson's poem titled "I am nobody, who are you?", where she appears to lament the anonymity of a woman and a denial of her identity. Bidyutprava Devi's 'Dilemma', deftly juxtaposes a woman's involuntary submission to a system which treats her no better than a caged animal with a bold defiance as well as an undying hope. This brings into mind Emily Jane Bronte:

> Still let my tyrants know, I am not doomed to wear
> In gloom and desolate despair
> A messenger of Hope comes every night to me
> And offers for short life, eternal liberty ("The Prisoner")

The 1950s and the 1960s witnessed the advent of western modernism in Odia poetry. Sachi Routray, the greatest poet of the period, popularized the modernist movement in his writing. During the 1970s the modernist approach was experimented with not as a deviation from the traditionalism and romanticism; it was rather a quest for a new sensibility, something traditional poetry did not offer. Prativa Satpathy, a reputed woman poet of the period, used the modernist approach not only to express a sense of loss and defeat that permeates a woman's world but also to voice a bold argument in favour of a woman asserting her self-esteem.

> In the south of the vast continent
> the woman who just turned sixty
> searches frantically at the crossroads
> Every moment to find out
> Where her home is—
> God Himself dares not stand
> By her side and show her the way.
> ("God Dares Not", translated by CN Narayanswami)

At the same time, her poetry celebrates womanhood in lines like

Womanhood is an honour
And a hidden vitality
Which belongs not merely to a woman's body
But also to her dreams and fantasies.
("It is Not Disrobing" translated by CN Narayanswami)

Surprising though it may appear, the influence of western modernism was slowly wearing off in Odia poetry by the late 1970s and early 1980s. A marked change was discerned in the way poets began looking at life. Modernist methods started to get replaced by a tendency to look back at the past and to revive a connection with it by drawing upon myths and legends. Attempts were now made to lend their writing new contours and a new appeal. Introducing myths as a medium of forging emotional links with the past had become a standard practice in poetry writing in this era. A number of young poets in the 1980s including women poets like Giribala Mohanty, Prabasini Mahakuda Tiwari brought an element of freshness into Odia poetry exploring conventional themes from different angles. By the beginning of 1990 the economic and socio-political scenario in India had undergone a drastic change. The impact of the changing mindset found a vivid expression in Indian poetry. Odia poets, too, came under the influence of the changing times. In the succeeding two decades Odisha witnessed the emergence of a group of realistic poets, commonly known as the third generation clan, whose poetic endeavor was directed at presenting a realistic picture of the socio-economic-cultural environment. Their style eschewed the emotional and the fanciful. The diction was free from all forms of artificiality, and was transparent and intimate. The most energetic and versatile women poets belonged to this category and like their male counterparts strived to promote a cult of the aesthetics of realism. The evolving roles of women, during these two decades placed them at the centre of the systemic and socio structural changes. Armed with tremendous self-confidence and with a greater degree of self-esteem, these poets tried to protest

against the injustice meted out to them by a system run by patriarchal norms, and strongly endorsed a woman's legitimate rights which have for long years been trampled upon by a society that is primarily a male construct.

In 1992, a collection of the English translations (by JP Das and Arlene Zide) of the works of Odia women poets titled *Under a Silent Sun*, was brought out by Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi. The anthology included poems by Odia women writers born between 1948 and 1968. The present anthology is a continuation that initiative of the venture and contains the works of some of the distinguished Odia women poets born after 1965. The thirteen women poets included in this collection added new dimensions to Odia poetry by not stopping at focusing their attention on exclusively feminine issues and by exploring the complex realities that conditioned the life of individuals in a time clouded by the horrors of communal riots, terrorist attacks, moral decadence, continued exploitation of the lower and underprivileged sections of society. No doubt, some of the poems articulate a protest against the hegemony of patriarchy and male chauvinism but they also endeavor to address the basic issues of life in a broader perspective.

Chirashree Indrasingh's poem 'Farmer's Song', deals with the recent agrarian crisis that has led to farmers' suicides. It portrays the struggle, the hardship and poverty that blight the life of a farmer. The celebration of the seed-sowing festival that marks the beginning of creation ironically turns out to be an invitation to death. The failure to repay the loan he has incurred compels him to put an end to his life and drives his family to perpetual doom. Similarly, Gayatribala Panda's 'Tiger' is a subtle mockery of the deportment of modern men everyone of whom keeps brute instincts (symbolized by the tiger) carefully concealed under a veneer of aristocratic sophistication. At the same time, the poet expresses her

concern about the abuse of modern technology that alienates man from nature:

> I sensed that as long as the
> human population grew
> tigers wouldn't perish
> mobile phones and the Internet
> will make the tigers obstinate, arrogant,
> ambitious. ("Tiger")

"Country" gives voice to a sense of incertitude that pervades the common man's life at present. The poet seems to be skeptical about her own patriotic sentiments:

> I do not know what to do about such a land
> Even though it flows as blood in my veins
> I do not know how to advise others
> How to love this country. ("Country")

Shock, doubt, despair and a feeling of resignation are the major components in the theme of 'Violence': All those who went up the stairs

> Before I did –
> Did they all have redhued sweat?
> Did they all have a vaulting ambition
> To attain fame? ("Violence")

'Darling Daughter' by Swapna Mishra defines a woman's struggle for fulfilment of her cherished dreams as an exercise in futility.

> Don't keep searching
> Forget all you know—
> Face the endless depths
> Beneath your feet,
> Darling daughter
> Accept
> the realty. ("Darling Daughter")

If 'Darling Daughter' grieves for the ignominy inflicted on a woman, Madhuri Panda's 'A Time To Speak Out' is a bold

defense against the restraints imposed on a woman. Here is a poet that leads a crusade against the world of silence a woman is forced to carry within herself, makes a brave effort to claim that the power to articulate that silence is well within the reach of a woman.

> I'll light lamps of words
> In every house.
> How can I be silent when
> I am thus steeped with words? ("A Time To Speak Out")

Sharmistha Sahu's 'Flight' examines the endless possibilities life holds out to a woman and encourages her to soar above the limitedness of her existence and take flight to an infinite expanse of achievement.

Love's eternity is celebrated in a graceful style in Sucheta Mishra's poem. One wonders if in 'Blue Sari' she regrets being a woman.

> But I know
> That it is only a piece of skin
> Which I'm clutching at
> Over the flesh and blood
> Of the woman's body that I've given
> Forever to be debased. ("Blue Sari")

Under the somber, resigned acceptance of her debasement expressed through the metaphor of the blue sari there lies buried the spark of a grim self-assertion though not as obvious as in Kim Addonizeo's words:

> I want a red dress.
> When I find it, I'll pull that garment
> From its hanger like I'm choosing a body
> To carry me into this world through
> The birth-cries and love-cries too,
> And I'll wear it like bones, like skin,
> It'll be the goddamned dress they bury me in.
> ("What Does A Woman Want?")

If Sunanda Pradhan's 'To the Sea Shore' is steeped with romanticism (Let's go and look at the moon on the sea shore), her 'Looking at the Sea' explores a world of bleak solitude and distrust the sea unveils.

Pritidhara Samal in 'Poetry' makes an effort to discover the latent force pulsating in poetry that has 'the power to change the meaning of life'. The paradox of human existence finds an eloquent expression in lines like 'poetry is a tumult of unending silence'.

Subhashree Lenka is a little way apart in her observations on the potential of a woman. For her, a woman is synonymous with 'creation' itself, a miraculous figure that holds all the five elements earth, water, air, fire and void inside her in perfect harmony.

Ipsita Sarangi's 'Born a Woman' reveals a woman's ability to transcend the limits of her finite self and spread out her 'existence to the two extremities of the horizon'.

Bhagyalipi Malla, in a poignant and evocative poem, delves into the depths of a woman's sense of insecurity and defines her quest for a blissful haven where she could escape the dread of losing her loved one/s. Tired of the unending game of pretence a woman's destiny forces her to be engaged in constantly, she tries to discover a lasting and comfortable repose where she could block out the visions of dreadful possibilities that threaten to demolish her.

The new generation of women poets have opened up a world of hope and promise by giving shape to a new female literary sensibility. Instead of keeping their role confined to a woman-centered activism and to the task of transforming female sentiments into finely articulated lyrics, they have widened their province of self-expression. Not satisfied with the conventional stereotypes they have developed a larger

consciousness and reached out to examine the multidimensional reality of human existence from serious philosophical perspectives. Their works lend a fresh definition to Odia poetry written by women and spell out a bright future for upcoming women poets of Odisha.

* **Snehaprava Das** is a well-known translator. Her English translations of classic Odia novels include *Padmamali, Bibasini* and *Mane Mane* (A World Within). She has also translated into English a selection of Odia Stories by Manoj Panda (*One Thousand Days in a Refrigerator*) and Pandit Gopabandhu Das's *Bandira Atmakatha* (*Autobiography of a Prisoner*)

CONTENTS

Bhagyalipi Malla (born 1965) has published collections of poetry and essays in literary and cultural journals. She has received awards including the National Excellent Women's Award and Rajiv Gandhi Sammana. Address: Dr. B. Malla, Superintendent, Odisha State Archives, Bhubaneswar-751001 Tel: 94392 81561. E-mail:odishastatearcives@gmail.com

MIRROR

It makes them all its very own,
exactly as they are –
looks, form, tears,
odds and ends, fate and futility,
and the curse of the evil gods.

Every time I make up my mind
to get away from the mirror,
I find it ahead of me,
throwing everything back at me,
sending me back time and again
to my own darkness.

Now, I cannot encounter my own face.
I only see renunciation
and get a glimpse of the exile
in the hermit's hut.

When I ask the mirror
to tell me about myself,
it keeps silent,
confirming the truth
that reflections and images
are forever mute.

THE SUMMIT

The untold dreams in the skies, the river,
the silence, the snow-hewed flowers,
the unmindfulness –
you have settled yourself on them all
turning your back
on sound and time.

Sunk in renunciation,
hiding behind false mirrors,
you hold on yet to your countenance
and the fickle mysteries and passions.

Wherever you look,
there is only a bleached image
of an imagined past.

You have placed yourself in a corner
where the sky meets your solitude,
and where life is torn
between renunciation and rejoicing.

HIDE AND SEEK

If you hide yourself,
I'm not sure I would ever find you.
You are always looking for ways to hide,
like the moon lost sailing into a stormy night,
like mountain peaks hidden behind teary eyes.

But where can you hide yourself?
The earth doesn't have darkness enough,
nor the flower space on its petals.
There is no space on the bee's wings,
or in the scarf of the breeze,
or in the lushness of the trees to hide you.

Give up the game of hide and seek.
Take away my vision if you can
and let the charade end.

Stay wherever you wish.
I would close my eyes
and get over my eternal dread
of losing you in the dark.

Chirashree Indrasingh (born 1966) has twelve collections of poetry and short stories to her credit. She has received Sucharita Galpa Purashkar and many other literary awards. Address: U.N. College, Adashpur, Cuttack-754011, Tel: 9439725908, E-mail: chirashree.indrasingh@gmail.com

FARMER'S SONG

1

Awake all night
the farmer separates
grains and birds
from the ears of corn.
By morning,
paddy bags are stacked up
in someone's granary
as chirping birds
look for beakfuls of darkness.

2

We have a day marked
to celebrate the festival
of sowing paddy.
That day,
we disallow honeybees
to go on leave.
That day,
we spin yarns from sunshine
and fashion a sari of our choice
blending the clouds and
the lightning and the wind
and the festivities.

3

Unable to repay his loan
a farmer of our village
swallowed pesticide
That should have been
the end of the story.
But his mother was seen
going round lamenting
that the bottle of honey
she had saved over the years
to treat the children for cold
was gone with him too!

THAT NIGHT

I do not remember
if that night
there was a moon
or it was dark.
But I know you were there.
I didn't see
if there in the garden
flowers had blossomed or not.
But, since you were there,
I had transformed myself
into a tree of countless flowers
with a heavenly scent.
That night,
amidst the swarm of moths
you were there;
and I was a green forest
made of a million moths.
I am not sure
if you were there that night;
but that night,
I had confronted
all my stark passions
alone, by myself.

Sucheta Mishra: (born 1965) has published ten anthologies of poetry, three novels, one collection of short stories and one collection of essays. She has received several literary awards including the Odia Yuva Sammana (1997) and the Gangadhar Foundation Award. Address: Lead Bank Lane (Old), Police Line, Puri-752001. Tel: 99371 59891 E-mail: suchetamishra@gmail.com

THE BLUE SAREE

I have a blue saree that I wear
for the wedding of my friend
and the funeral rites of my neighbour's wife
who died a mysterious death.

Sometimes I take it out of the closet
to air it in the sun.
It is moth-eaten
but I keep on darning and repairing it
for I have to save it to bear witness to
many more sorrows and insults.

My lover writes to me
praising my blue saree,
but that too is a lie,
for all that he sees in it
is only flesh and heat and sensation.

I treasure my blue saree
to wear while standing beside
the wedding altar of my friend,
and the charred body of my neighbour.

They say I look special and beautiful
in that blue saree.
But I know
that it is only a piece of skin
which I'm clutching at
over the flesh and blood
of the woman's body that I've been given
forever to be debased.

LOVE

Don't try to tell me what history is,
for I know that love is greater.

I have seen edifices
standing on firm foundations of history
crumble and fall,
as I have also seen the tiny seed,
lost in the crevices of stone slabs,
grow into a full-blown tree.

If you look for them
there are instances galore in history,
but love does not need crutches
of instances.

With its million fingers
love takes out the greenery from darkness
and weaves a strange bond
with the bird perched on the tree,
as also with the man, axe in hand,
standing under its shade.
The bond outlives the bird which has flown
and the tree felled by the axe.
Hungry folks in their search
are elated to see twin leaves sprouting
from the split trunk of the fallen tree.

They think it's a miracle, and, so
they write that down on the pages of history.

Swapna Mishra: (born 1970) has published three collections of poems and three novels. She is the recipient of Ankura Purashkar and the Rajdhani Pustaka Mela Purashkar. Address: Sector-2, B-287, NALCO Damanjori, Koraput-763008. Tel: 94373 28817, E-mail: dilliprout.down@gmail.com

BOON

I gave you freedom.
I gave you the boon
to disappear
in the skies
like the illusory cloud.
The dried flower bud
between the pages
of the old diary:
I gave you a lovely garden.
The moon rising
over the eyelids:
I gave you the river bank
and the expanse of sand
which you always wanted.

I gave you moonlight.
I became blind.

DARLING DAUGHTER

My darling daughter !
Don't look up at the sky;
look below at the earth.
Oh! how easily you obey.

Look at all the blood
in the skies.
The evening is giving birth
to an eternal night.

Some day,
when they dredge
this civilisation of ours,
they will surely find
your tear drops,
still fresh.
The fossil would reveal
how cruel the world has been.

No flowers bloom
in the garden;
our breathing
is bereft of air.
Don't keep searching.
Forget all you know.

Don't look at the skies,
don't look at the earth.
Face the endless depths
beneath your feet.

Darling daughter,
accept the reality.

Madhuri Panda: (born 1971) has three collections of poetry to her credit. Address: sector 2B/ 287, NALCO, Damanjodi, Koraput-763008, Odisha. Tel: 8895185425, mail: mpanda54@gmail.com

A TIME TO SPEAK OUT

You ask me to be silent,
but how can I, at this time?
I have just finished making
the flowers of words bloom.
Some were jealous,
some threw mud at me,
some others put me on the dock.
But then,
some picked up the flowers too.
I had nothing to call my own,
but I'm happy that all my secrets
are now in the open.
If you have a grenade in your hand,
I've love in my heart,
and I know
that nothing matches its colour.
How can I then be silent
at a time like this?
I'll light lamps of words
in every house.
How can I remain silent
when I'm thus steeped in words?
I'll make even you eloquent.

TILL THEN

Our tears we drank as if nectar.
Did fate destine us for such darkness?
We had nothing more to say to each other.
We were destined to stray
and we got lost.
Our days passed in indifference,
but myriad changes have occurred since.
People have built their houses
in villages wiped off by cyclone,
and have regained their faith.
The girl who had run away
is back home, three months gone.
The uproar over Radha goes on.
The sky remains the same.
Nothing more has happened to us.
The fire which had scarred our dreams
continues to burn us.

Listen to what I say from my heart:
I say that everything will change.
Crossing the barbed wire fence,
I'll come back wearing the blue sari
I had saved from another birth,
and, we will resume our talk
from where we had left off.
And, yes,
the word you searched for restlessly
to end your poem with,
I promise you,
I'll come as that lost word;
I'll surely come again.

Sharmistha Sahu: (born 1971) has published three collections of poetry. She has received literary awards including Odisha Bahimela Sammana and Saptarshi Kavita Sammana. Address: C/o. S. K. Bhoi, Principal, DAV Public School, MCL Kalinga Area, At-Balaram Township, Satabdi Nagar, Dist-Angul-759148, E-mail: sharmisthas61@gmail.com

IN SILENCE

Your unseen hand
knocks on the door
and I dissolve
beyond the body's walls.
There is turmoil
in the garden.
The flower of life
is breathless with fragrance.
How many times shall I tear apart the webs of illusion, and
look for blood-soaked light in the ocean of tears ?
Let the communion
of the closed door
fall silent.
Let me not return
to the confines of my body.
let you materialise
before me,
this moment.

FLIGHT

There is
a bird inside me;
it knows
that my chest
is not its cage.
It sings
as it flies;
it bewilders me
with its many guises.
It keeps flying
severing relationships,
tearing apart intimacies.
It flies
flaming a million lights,
splitting the turbulent dark.
Because it flies
I am limitless.
I keep scattering the wind,
but it does not run out.
How futile of you
to keep measuring me,
appraising the shape
of my eyes, nose and lips!

CHIAROSCURO

Is my love
part real, part illusion ?
How terribly lonesome I am
on this path !

The leaf that trembles
hesitant on the tree,
my heart which flutters
at my own footfall –
be silent and stand still.

I have stolen the light
from the distant horizons
of my mist-ridden journey.

My mortality is my beauty.
My loneliness is my strength.

I am surrounded
by the grey eyes of dusk.
The ultimate confessions,
written with my blood,
suffuse my inner being.

You stand there
beyond the moments
of light and shade.
Could I possibly
call you my own ?

Subhashree Lenka: (born 1973) has to her credit four collections of poems. A collection of her poems translated in English titled *Nightscapes* has been published recently. Address: Gita Bhavan, Poruapada, New Colony, Balasore-756001, Tel: 9437798920 E-mail: suvashree06@gmail.com

SHOWER AT SUNSET

The shower at sunset
washed the dust from the leaves,
whisked away the remnants
of tenderness from the petals,
swept away the layers of pollution
from the sky's expanse,
and,
gave back the fervour of flight
to the fatigued fledgling.
The shower at sunset
opened the doors of the house
lying locked and neglected for ages
and shattered its silence.
It stepped unto the darkness
of the abandoned place,
where lay trapped in time
emptiness, loneliness
and many forgotten passions.

The tremor of the droplets,
in enchanting whispers,
sent out the message of dreams
and flowers and scent and magic
and of close intimacy.

The shower at sunset
made us remember
to get drenched all night long,
and to drift like a piece of straw
in the fast flowing stream
of passionate yearnings.

COME THIS NIGHT

This night
in her star-studded brocade saree
looks as if an ever-youthful angel,
bewitched by the earth,
has chosen to descend.
There is a fragrance in the air
and a fire in the breath
and faith flows like a lost river.
Wings take butterfly hues and wait
to fly unto the petal the dust of moonlight.
This, my body of five elements,
turns into a temple
to welcome the beloved one in a redolence
of camphor, sandal and incense.
It seeks to swim
in the river lost in mist and dew;
it wishes to warm up
the secreted desires in a simmering fire.
Come this night
in a vapour of musk on your body.
Hold me captive in your supple arms.
Come in the sound of anklets
on your lotus-red feet
and trample on the slumber of my body.
Come with the thirst
of living in your drunken eyes;
come with the burning flame of passion
in your thirsting lips.

Let's then, the two of us,
like birds searching for honey in flower dust,
sing to every pore of our bodies
the hearty ditties of pleasure.
Let blood, marrow, flesh, nerve and bone
keep awake all night long.
Let the water drops on lotus leaves breathe
eternal life unto the slumbering moments.

Come, let's together shatter
the utter silence of this night.

ONCE YOU'VE DONNED THE POET'S GARB

Once you have donned the poet's garb,
you forget the restraints that encircle you;
you forget wife, son, daughter,
the heaps of files on the office table,
and the boss's angry face.
Your thoughts stretch out like a kite string
enticed by the far horizons.
The surrounding noise abates.
Your feet grow cold,
and a wintry soft loneliness grips you
though you're in the midst of a crowd.
In times like these, the poet leans
on his pen, his only friend.
Sometimes he strains and struggles
to capture the words eluding his grasp;
at other times,
reposed on the throne of his chosen words,
he caresses the poem with a paternal touch.
In the heavenly garden,
swaying like a divine flower,
decked-up ideas and expressions
come floating, exuding fragrance
in rolling waves of poetry.
The poet loses himself in his own creation.
After the pangs of creation,
the poet gathers his gains and returns
to his own intimate circle.
And as soon reverts
to being father, brother, flunkey
till such a time
as he might don the poet's garb again.

WOMAN

Earth:

You dig and plough her,
and she offers you food;
she braves cyclones and quakes
and stays calm.

Water:

Drawn from well and river
she gives life to the thirsty.
A sword can't split her apart.
She bears all her scars
as if writ on water.

Air:

Scents sweet and foul –
she envelops all in her graces.
Good and bad –
she shelters them all
with her benign goodness.

Fire:

She burns eternally
in the lac-house of pain
to emerge as pure gold;
even though consumed
by the fires of body and mind.

Void:

Everyone her own
she hands out affection,
intimacy, love
with a generous heart;
even as she hides
within her limitless bosom,
as wide as the open skies,
all the sound and fury
of thunder and lightning.

YOUR HAND

Soft and warm
like the dove's breast
your hand touches me all over,
wipes off my loneliness
and washes me with your
sandal-scented intimacy.
Holding your hand,
I walk and cover far distances
in difficult terrain
in a flitting moment.
Your hand shows me the way
in the darkest night
even as it sweeps away
obstacles from my path
before my feet touch the ground.
Sometimes your hand
pats me on the back, lovingly,
as I drift between mid-dream
and unfulfilled wishes
and my straying eyes close
and I slide into a deep sleep.
Your hand caresses
the unruly tresses falling on my face,
wipes off the drops of sweat,
and relieves me
of all my silent, secret sorrows
and all my tender laments.

Pritidhara Samal (born 1973) has to her credit four poetry collections and a research volume on Ramakanta Ratha's poems. She has received awards including the State Youth Award in 2006. At present she teaches Odia in Government Women's College, Koraput-764020, E-mail: pritidharasamal@gmail.com

POETRY

There is someone inside me
who is looking for poetry
all the time.
But then, poetry is not a ladder
which you climb up
to touch the skies.
It's not a boat to go across
the seas of life and death.
Poetry is the tumult
of unending silence inside me;
it's the enchanted feeling
which is at the same time
both helpless and all powerful.
It's a weapon
which cannot alter fate and future,
but it has the power
to change the meaning of life –
whether in anger or in love.
That's the reason
I seek out poetry.
Poems pull me out
from abysmal depths;
give me support like pillars.

Poems pave for me a golden path
clearing my mind of rubbish.
Poems fill me up
with multiple manifestations
pushing away my wailing griefs.
When a feeling dies inside me,
they blow through me
like a fresh breath of air.
It's said
that poetry tells lies
and fabricates false dreams.
May be,
but it has also become my very own
and blessed me with solace.
It has stood by me like a shadow
when everyone has forsaken me.

SUNDAY

I had many plans for today:
to invoke lost relationships;
to nurture the seedling
fashioned out of the night's darkness;
to water the flower pots;
to spruce up my living room
with a handful of morning light;
to gather a drop of dew from the grass
and secrete it in the jewel box.
I freed myself from my burdens
and resolved that:
I'd scrub off the dirt and dust
gathered on my body;
I'd rescue my mind from neglect;
I'd remove cobwebs from dense times;
I'd tidy up my house
from the anarchy of disorder.
But nothing got done.
Before I could make up my mind
from where to start,
someone walked past my house.
I heard a lonely wail
as if from the eternal void.
A wounded joy assailed me.
The roaring ocean stood still.
My shadow lengthened and vanished.
I drifted like a boat
into the blue river of the past.

A lost smile alighted on my lips.
I had got nothing done today.
But then, imagine,
how successful and meaningful
the day had been for me!

Pratiksha Jena (born 1974) has published two collections of poems. Her first collection of poems was published in 2014 by Sahitya Akademi under the Navodaya Scheme. She has since come out with another collection. Address: Qr. No.B/2127, Nalco Nagar, Angul-759154. E-mail : pmuskan789@gmail.com

CHESS BOARD

Under whose ruthless orders
are some people getting displaced
leaving behind hearth and home
and the identity of their ancestors ?

They tie up in bundles
the sweat saved over the years,
broken pieces of living,
and a handful of dust
from the wilting golden harvest.

At the same time
some people are taking over
through trickery
the treasures of heaven
and the lost keys of a golden citadel.
And, gleefully decorating
their palaces, courts
and their chess boards of deceit.

God!
Can you be trusted?
I know, there is no answer to this.

AHALYA

I wish to turn into stone
for once.

Once did I wish for something
and doors had opened
and the forest had vanished.

In my greed,
I had gathered a potful of false affections
mixed in sand and grit.

Tell me,
what curse grows on that fertile soil now.

I had collected from the dark chamber
a handful of faith
which now fades in the sunlight.
I did not know that,
nor did you.

Look,
numbness creeps up my feet,
my thighs and my waist
and the layers of memories of your body.

One seeks to put together
the broken pieces of the mirror
and cook and serve on a leaf platter
the two restless eyes snatched by magic.

An island sinks mid-ocean,
and, I slowly turn into stone.

SUNLIGHT

You could have given me
a cool fullmoon night,
but since I asked,
you tied to my sari end
a handful of latticed sunlight.

As I undress,
I find sunlight escaping from my sari
and getting strewn all over the floor
like handfuls of rice.

There is sunshine, the colour of fish,
in the warm breath of the two shadows
holding hands in the virgin embrace
of the dark night.

Burn me down if you wish
in a blazing fire.
Let sunlight drip off my body
in droplets of sweat.

Ipsita Sarangi (born 1975) has published four collections of poetry. She has translated a collection of Octavio Paz, in Odia(published by Odisha Sahitya Akademi). She has received awards including Odisha State Youth Award for poetry in 2001. Address: Lecturer in English, Niali College, Cuttack-754004, Tel: 98613 33944. E-mail: poetipsita@gmail.com

TRUTH UNTRUTH

I do not know the art
of converting lies into truths.
I do not know what makes it
a truth or a lie.
May be all that gives me pain
is the truth,
and all the truth you want to hide
from me is a lie.
I had proclaimed from the house-tops
that I would speak the truth
and nothing but the truth,
but it was an empty boast.
In the end, I was as lonely as ever.
Can one lay himself open to truth
the way he wants ?
I didn't get what I wanted
or, may be,
I wanted much more than I got.
May be all that I thought was right
turned out to be all wrong.

The shadow that stands
across all truths
is a hand that points at the truth,
and is the answer
that will resolve all my doubts.

BORN A WOMAN

You have to spread out
your existence
to the two extremities
of the horizon.

You have to turn your eyes
away from the demands
of body and mind
and paint on your lips
a perpetual smile.

You have to persuade yourself
that you can live only when
you keep your sulk hidden
in some secret cavity.

Sometimes, your very existence
would seem to be
desolate as the skies;
your verdant dreams
would drop dead on the ground
in the swelter of unconcern.

After the swinging days
in the laps of flowers,
it is now your time
to be trapped in the petals
and go begging
for another breath of life.

Sunanda Pradhan (born 1976) has to her credit three collections of poetry, three collections of short stories and five novellas. She edits *Megha*, a poetry magazine in Odia and heads *Ink Odisha* a leading publishing house of Odisha. Address: 115/P Acharya Vihar Bhubaneswar-751013 Tel: 9439366566 E-mail:sunandapari@gmail.com

IF YOU MEET A POET

If you like a poet's poems
read them again and again;
learn them by rote;
remember them;
recite them to yourself
in the solitude
of open fields and rooftops.
But
never
Never try to meet the poet.
May be, when you see him
your passion for poetry
may crack
like an eggshell.

The poet's mind
may not be as beautiful
as his beautiful poems;
his heart might not beat
like a rippling stream
You may find him more common
than the common man.

Read the poem
and forget the poet
forever.
If you happen
to meet a poet
somewhere, sometime,
never seek to find in him
a poet's soul
or a lover's charm.

HOLI

If you wish
to splatter me
with colours,
come to me
in the silent hours
of the night,
after the city
has gone to sleep.
With your bare hands
smear the whole
of my body
with colours yellow
and red
and green.

Let the colours
ripple over
from my body
to my mind,
and from my mind
to my soul.

Let the colours
thwart cleaning
and stay fast
on my body.

Let a new day break
in virgin, vibrant colours.

TO THE SEA SHORE

Let's go
to the sea shore
for once
and look at the moon
sitting on the sands.

We'll sit in silence
side by side:
no words, no laughter.
We'll simply look
at the lonley moon.
The sea breeze
will pull at my saree
and touch me
on the earlobe, cheek
and my whole body.

And we'll sit there
quiet in the moonlight
for a few moments.

Time hangs heavy
and I'm restless.
Let's go
and look at the moon
on the sea shore.

LOOKING AT THE SEA

I shall never
go to the sea
all by myself.

I like to look at the sea
in silence.
I like the cool breeze,
the beach, the moonlight.

But I do not
want the sea
in solitude.
I do not want its touch,
its trust,
and its faithlessness.

I know
that the sea
cannot be distrusted,
nor can you
put your faith in it.

It may take away
my remaining years
and my dreams.

Never again shall I go
to the sea alone
to be flung between
faith and betrayal.

Having lost
all my passion
and having distanced myself
from trust and faith,
and having given up
all my desires,
I shall never go
to look at the sea again.

Gayatribala Panda (born 1977) has to her credit nine collections of poetry, three novels and a collection of short stories. She has received the Sahitya Akademi Yuva Purashkar in Odia for her poetry collection *Gaan* (Village) in 2011 and Rajiv Gandhi Sadvavana Award. Address: Flat no 804, Tower no. 3, Vipul Gardens, Ghatikia Bhubaneswar-751003, Tel: 9437438699, E-mail: gayatri.panda77@mail.com

VIOLENCE

There lies the handkerchief
soaked in blood.
It's the same one
I'd wiped my face with,
the same one I'd bought
for a mere ten rupees.

I had walked up the stairs in haste
wiping off the sweat on my face;
by the time I walked down,
the white handkerchief lay
at the bottom of the stairs
drenched in blood.

All those who went up the stairs
before I did –
did they all have red-hued sweat?
Did they all have a vaulting ambition
to attain fame?

There is no one else here.
Only me and my hunger.
Whose blood is this then –
of which bird or beast?

How does it matter to me?
Let me look over my hands,
my forehead, my clothes.
There is no blood there.
Why should I then worry?

Clouds darken the sky.
Let me take leave;
let me reach home
as fast as I can.

TIGER

The subject of today's meeting
is the decline
in tiger numbers
from countries, forests, and also from our
minds.
On this,
some expressed sorrow,
some were agitated.
Some others suggested ways
to increase the tiger population.
Some ascribed it
to the devastation of forests;
some put the blame
on man's excessive fear of tigers.
Some pointed their fingers
at industrialisation
even as some argued
that globalisation was the root cause.
Sitting at a corner of the back row
I imagined the lecture hall
to be a dense forest
and the speakers, each of them a tiger,
alive and abominable.
I pictured a tiger opening its jaws
when they spoke, their rant a wild roar.
When they gasped
I could make out a fiery pretense.
When they put forth their proposals
it was as if they were leaping at the
gallery
inviting the audience into their maws.

I sensed that as long as
the human population grew,
tigers wouldn't perish
Mobiles, phones and the Internet
will make tigers obstinate, arrogant,
ambitious
and they'd, in the twinkling of an eye,
reach the recesses of the earth
and touch the skies.

I saw tigers emerging
from mobile phones and laptops
and springing at us.
I could well imagine the big cats
holding condolence meetings
for the extinction of mankind

COUNTRY

Where do I stand?
I have no guns, no bombs, no spears.
I have only a pen
and my imagination and my sorrow.

The words I picked up at random
and secreted in my room
suffocate me in my helplessness.

Some words, shot down by Maoists,
lie helpless in jungles and caves.
Some unknown words, placards in hand,
are on a sit-down strike.
Some words are making rounds
of courtrooms year after year.
Some words wait patiently
in the Panchayat courtyard
for their BPL cards and old age pension.
Some words seek to salvage their fate
in a surfeit of darkness after the rape.

I am in my room
surrounded by those words
amid blood and tears and pity and sighs.
I do not know what I should be doing
for my country.
The country belongs to those
who have muscle power, money
and it is they who worry about the country.
Or so they say.

Where do I stand?
My heart palpitates
if someone cries somewhere.
My confidence is shaken
when someone faces defeat.
When someone trips and falls,
it breaks my heart.

I have no guns, no bombs, no spears;
I have no weapons to protect anyone,
I only have my pen, my brush
and my restlessness.
I sit in my room surrounded by them
and write poems and paint pictures,
and shuffle about.

The words, the paintings and the people
I do not know what to do about such a land.
Even though it slows as blood in my veins
I do not know how to advise others
how to love this country.

Srustishree Nayak (born 1977) has published a collection of short stories and an anthology of poems. She is the recipient of Sahitya Akademi Yuva Purashkar. Address: Tambibahal, Bhedabahal, Sundargarh-770073, Odisha, Tel: 9178016806.

NO ONE COMES

No one comes;
why is then
this eternal waiting ?

I sit open-eyed
and all agog,
my ears pricked up
for the sound of footfalls,
and my doors wide open –
but no one comes.

Years have passed
and I've continued to wait,
but the one
who had made the promise
has not turned up.

The lines under my eyes
are now darker;
passions have frozen;
emotions have turned to sighs.
In the fire of separation
love has turned into a handful of ashes.

But,
I haven't given up yet;
and I am hopeful still,
as I realize
that for one dedicated waiting
an entire lifetime
is indeed too short.

HOME

I have lived in it for years
but haven't been able
to call it my own is
it really my home?

You said
it's my inheritance;
so, I've stayed on here keeping
the hearth burning,
rolling wicks for the prayer lamp,
nursing plants in the garden.
But when I sweep the rooms,
I find myself thrown out
with the garbage.

Nothing is ordained I know;
but I try to realize myself
within the confines of the four walls.
I take measured steps,
cautious of the door sill,
dreaming all the while
of living elsewhere.

But where is that home
the real life trapped in another?
Where is the secret home
that I've been building
within the other one?

I wonder whose home is this one
that I've been propping up
all these years
with my blood and sweat?
Whose is it really
when all my dreams,
my love, and even my identity
all lie elsewhere ?

In Other Words

Poems by Odia Women Poets

J.P.Das (born 1936) is a well-known poet, fiction writer and playwright from Odisha. As an art historian, he has written several volumes on the pictorial arts of Odisha. He has been widely translated into English and other Indian languages and his plays have been staged all over India. He is winner of many honours including the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Saraswati Samman.

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